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ADMINISTRATION OF GDR WATERWAYS

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The navigable parts of rivers and lakes, canals, and those stretches of coastal waters which are navigable for inland ships constitute the waterways of the GDR (German Democratic Republic). Compared with railroads and highways, waterways have certain disadvantages; because of geography and costs they cannot form as close a net as railroads and highways, traffic on them moves at a relatively slow speed, and this traffic may stop altogether when there is ice, drought, or high water. On the other hand, waterways have the advantage of low operating costs and consequently very low freight rates. For this reason, they have always been the preferred means of transportation for cheap bulk goods which cannot stand onerous freight rates.

The waterways in the GDR total approximately 3,150 kilometers in length, of which 420 kilometers are coastal waters. Approximately 10 percent of all transportation within the GDR is handled by inland water transportation.

In contrast to the railroads, which not only build and maintain their lines but also control the traffic thereon, waterway transportation itself comes only indirectly under the Waterways Administration. On the other hand, the tasks of building and maintaining waterways and their installations (locks, etc.) are by their nature far more difficult and varied than in the case of either railroads or highways. It is a matter of common knowledge that the building of canals has always made most stringent demands on the skill of the engineers. But even the natural waterways have come to be man-made structures under a modern waterways administration, owing to the constantly exercised influence on their course, the speed of their current, and the depth of the water.

The waterways are intended not only for transportation; they also serve for bathing and washing, for fishing, and provide water for livestock. In addition, they provide water and drainage for waste water. The Waterways Administration, therefore, has a multitude of widely varied functions to perform

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which are frequently very difficult. Having a direct bearing on the ground-water level, mistakes or errors in construction planning may have dire consequences for the fertility of neighboring soil or even for the climate of a region. Considerable difficulties, which, however, frequently transcend the scope of the functions of the Waterways Administration, are encountered in the reconciliation of conflicting interests which quite often arise between water transportation and industrial concerns using large quantities of water, such as mills and hydroelectric power plants.

The principal function of the Waterways Administration is to keep traffic moving smoothly. For this purpose the water level must not only be kept as constant as possible; it is also necessary to keep the water transport enterprises continually informed of the water level, because the load capacity of a ship depends on its draft. Abnormal water conditions, i.e., drought, high water, or ice, must be controlled as much as possible.

As regards the matter of policing traffic, the duties of regulating and supervising water transportation are at this time [September 1951] still being jointly performed by the Waterways Administration and the German People's Police.

The numerous administrative functions which only can be sketched briefly here are being performed by approximately 3,700 people comprising the apparatus of the Waterways Administration. Immediate operational authority is vested in waterways offices (Wasserstrassenamt) located as a rule at the most important junctions of water traffic, for example, in Magdeburg, Dresden, Brandenburg, or Stralsund.

Intermediate agencies are represented by the Waterways Directorates. According to an article in Der Verkehr, Vol III, No 9, September 1949, all Waterways Directorates were dissolved through the establishment of the DSU (Central Office of German Water Transport and Transshipping) on 27 July 1949. The Berlin Directorate includes the offices of Land Brandenburg and most of the offices of Land Mecklenburg. The authority of the Magdeburg Directorate embraces the Laender of Sachsen and Sachsen-Anhalt. (Thuringen has no navigable waterways and therefore no waterways directorate.)

Besides the two directorates, the Waterways Administration has two Main Offices for Waterways (WSHA, Wasserstrassenhauptamt), one being located in Berlin, the other in Rostock, they were established as late as 1948. According to articles in Der Verkehr, Vol IV, No 2, February 1950, and Vol IV, No 7, 8, July and August 1950, the WSHA's Rostock and Berlin were established in 1950. The Main Office for Waterways in Berlin was established to cope with the special conditions in Greater Berlin arising from the political situation there, while the Main Office for Waterways in Rostock (together with the Waterways Office in Stralsund) is primarily charged with the administration of the ocean waterways; it is the authority for all sea-going traffic including the seaports. At the top of the Waterways Administration is the Directorate General for Water Transport. Besides performing numerous other functions, the Directorate General constitutes the supreme waterways authority. It is charged with the central assignment of duties and supervises their performance. Like the Directorate General of the Reichsbahn and the Directorate General of Motor Transport and Highways, the Directorate General for Water Transport is subordinate to the Ministry of Transportation of the German Democratic Republic.

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